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SHOULD MY CHILD STUDY A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Dept. of Foreign Languages.

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Parents' most frequent questions about foreign language programs in U.S. public schools are answered in this leaflet. Topics briefly covered include (1) the problem of who should study a foreign language, (2) the selection of a foreign language, (3) the advantages of early language training, (4) the amount of time needed for competence in the target language, and (5) the audiolingual approach. (DS)

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pattern practice, and useful grammar is mastered through a process of analogy rather than analysis. This method makes the language live for the student, whose hearing and speaking control of it advances in carefully planned steps.

The development of the reading and writing skills, based on the strengthening audio-lingual skills, is thus similar to that of a native speaker of the language. The student, using scientifically designed materials and methods, learns to read and write directly in the target language, rather than translate laboriously out of and into it. The analytical study of grammar and the acquisition of a large vocabulary are most efficiently accomplished on a solid basis of near-native, but limited, control of the four skills.

These new audio-lingual techniques have also been developed to teach Latin grammar and vocabulary, and the grammar itself has been subjected to new analyses using the methods of structural linguisties or modifications thereof.

The teaching of foreign languages is getting better all the time. There are more materials available than ever before, and for the languages most commonly taught in our schools and colleges (French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish), commercial publishers offer full sets of teaching and learning materials. The use of language laboratories or electronic classrooms is growing more popular, and some colleges and universities are helping to solve the problems of language teachers in the public schools.

Foreign language programs are costly. Materials and equipment are considerably more expensive than the traditional textbook and blackboard. Classes, to be effective, must be small; therefore, more teachers are required.

However, in spite of cost factors and a shortage of teachers who excel in the use of languages, schools are establishing higher and higher goals for their language programs. Authorities now seem to agree that a minimum goal should be a working control of the skills of understanding and speaking the ability to read in the target language without translation, and the ability to write simple sentences. Students headed for college should be able to understand, speak, read, and write a socially acceptable form of one of the common Western languages.

The results of a good program are well worth the effort: students who have experienced effective second-language learning can move confidently into the learning of a third and fourth language, because they have developed an awareness of problems and techniques involved in language study.

For additional information, write to:

Modern Language Association of America
4 Washington Place
New York, New York 10003

American Classical League
Service Bureau
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

NEA Department of Foreign Languages
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

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SHOULD MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES BE TAUGHT IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES?

Authorities agree that language instruction should begin in the elementary grades, the exact starting point varying with the local situation. Francis Keppel, U.S. Commissioner of Education, said in a news conference in February 1964 that elementary language programs are of great value, for the younger the pupil, the more readily he acquires near-native proficiency in a spoken language. An important consideration in this regard is the opportunity for continuing any program begun in the lower grades. Pupils do not benefit much from instruction in French or any other language in the early grades, if they have to wait until the ninth or tenth grade to continue practicing it.

WHAT FOREIGN LANGUAGE SHOULD A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CHOOSE?

In many high schools, there isn't really much choice; a student wishing to study a second language has to take what the school program offers. Where there are choices, however, the student should base his decision on the following considerations: He should continue the language in which he has built a foundation in elementary school. If he begins his second language, modern or classical, in high school, he should take one in which a long sequence of study is offered, making some proficiency possible. It is important that the language he plans to continue in college be part of his twelfth-grade program. And finally, there is no best language for him to study. Well taught, any second language helps him break out of his monolingual shell, and that is the most important thing.

HOW LONG SHOULD ONE STUDY A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

Estimates vary, but a general assumption is that 8 to 10 years in school is necessary to attain useful control of a second spoken language. Facility in a language is the result of a set of habits acquired through long hours of practice. A recommendation of the National Association of Secondary School Principals states that a minimum of four years' sequential study should be available to all students who can profit from it. A good rule of thumb is that a working control of a language can be achieved in no less than 1,000 hours of instruction under competent teachers in relatively small classes. A two-year sequence of classical language study is useful, but to conduct a minimal Latin reading program, for example, at least three or four years are required.

WHAT ARE THE NEW METHODS OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION?

The most successful approach to language learning is the relatively new audio-lingual method, which stresses the importance of teaching first of all through the ear and the tongue, language being first and foremost oral communication. It recognizes that language is learned through daily practice and that the early stages of learning must emphasize listening and speaking, so that automatic control is achieved through mimicry, memorization, and

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As America's relations with other nations of the world expand, the need for knowledge of foreign languages in our country increases. This is an obvious reason for teaching foreign languages in our nation's schools and colleges.

A less obvious but equally important reason is the potential contribution of foreign language learning to an individual's liberal education. To communicate in a foreign language, to participate in a different culture, and to read in another literature is a broadening and lasting educational experience, a form of personal fulfillment.

Still another reason is that specialization in language study can lead to attractive career opportunities. In some positions, foreign language proficiency is a requirement; it is almost always an asset as a secondary qualification.

This leaflet raises and discusses some of the questions most commonly asked about foreign language programs in our public schools.

WHAT FOREIGN LANGUAGES, MODERN AND CLASSICAL, WILL BE USEFUL TO AMERICANS IN THE YEARS AHEAD?

Modern Languages

Within the next 20 years, *some* Americans will have to communicate in almost any one of the world's 2,000 or more spoken tongues —Wolof or French Creole, for example. *Many* Americans will require considerable skill in important languages both spoken and written: Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi, to name only three. *A great many* Americans will continue to need some degree of competence in the common Western languages such as French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. *Literate* Americans will continue to find in Racine and Cervantes, for example, richer and deeper meaning when read in the original than when read in translation.

Classical Languages

Any individual or group that loses contact with its history or its roots loses its sense of identity and of direction. The roots of our Western civilization and of its languages are in the great cultures represented by Latin and ancient Greek and Hebrew. Every young American with the ability and the interest to do so should be urged to study one classical language and its literature, preferably Latin. No culture, ancient or modern, can really be penetrated and understood except in and through its language. No classical language can be effectively studied without enriching and enlightening the student's use of modern language, native and foreign, and his understanding of our modern Western world.

WHO SHOULD STUDY FOREIGN LANGUAGES?

Anyone who has learned to speak English well has the ability and capacity to learn another spoken language. The Modern Language Association and the NEA Department of Foreign Languages recommend that every child have the opportunity, preferably in the early grades, to begin hearing and speaking a second language. The National Association of Secondary-School Principals recommends that every high school student have the opportunity to elect a foreign language and to continue it as long as his interest and ability permit, whether or not he is planning to go to college. The American Classical League and the NEA Department of Foreign Languages urge every student interested in language to include at least two years of Latin in his high school program and to continue it in college if possible.